

I'm writing this letter to highlight the very problematic and unfair tradition in the media of neglecting to credit illustrators and visual artists when celebrating children's books. Children's books are a vital part of our culture, helping to shape the people who will be the readers and thinkers of the future. Illustrated books for people of all ages would not exist without the illustrators who spend an enormous amount of their time and hard work lovingly bringing them to life. Yet time after time illustrators are uncredited and thereby essentially erased from the story.

There's a big part of me that struggles to come to terms with the fact that I even have to write this. Imagine having to ask people simply to mention your name when they use your work for their content. Yet here we are.

On Saturday, October 31st, BBC breakfast aired a segment with Lenny Henry on his upcoming children's book, where he talked about the importance of diversity in children's books. A significant part of this segment featured the artwork from a book that I had not only illustrated but also co-created. Yet each time the book was mentioned by Lenny Henry and the anchor, it was referred to as "Nathan Bryon's book".

This isn't the first time the BBC have featured a book by Nathan and me on one of their platforms and neglected to credit me: the first time

being in August, when the same book won the Waterstones Children's Prize 2020.

The BBC published an article with the headline "Benidorm star's joyful story wins children's book prize", as though Nathan won the award for an illustrated book category all by himself. To be very clear, Nathan consistently and fully supports and promotes the illustrator in this partnership, as do so many of the authors who work with artists in the children's publishing industry, none of this is on him. The book in question is a picture book which is predominantly made up of pictures (unsurprisingly) without which it'd be far less engaging – in fact it's a reading experience where the words and pictures work together to tell the story: both are integral.

I've been in the children's publishing industry for two years and it's become very apparent to me that there is a major problem when it comes to how illustrators and visual artists are valued by the media. It's really not on. The financial compensation for illustrators in all fields can be very modest; and then to suffer this erasure on top of that simply isn't acceptable. We become invisible when the media use our artwork for content or spotlight the success of our books and art with no mention of our names.

Whether we're just starting out in the industry or we've achieved mega fame and success it's the same: in August, the top five Sunday Times best-selling books were all illustrated books (see attached picture below) by industry veterans Tony Ross and Axel Scheffler as

well as newbies like myself, yet the only names on display were the authors' names.

judged. But it is let down by its organising analogies and arguments, and should be read with care. 📖

favourite short story. To see their choices, go to [shortstoryaward.co.uk](http://shortstoryaward.co.uk).

	Last week	Weeks in top 10
1	1	2
America, a group mobile library		
9	9	2
goes undercover to massacre (15,850)		
6	6	2
hister organisation gifts (13,860)		
3	3	18
Evaristo following the lives (12,310)		
4	4	21
a Owens ge tale of a family (11,225)		
2	2	2
er of an elusive (10,570)		
17	17	1
ings together group (8,360)		
5	5	4
acci returns to her home arance (7,630)		
—	—	1
ates digital clues ller (7,095)		
8	8	4
travels to sh (6,950)		

  

CHILDREN'S	
<b>1</b>	<b>The World's Worst Parents</b> David Walliams (HarperCollins £14.99) Tales of the world's silliest mums and daftest dads (16,285)
<b>2</b>	<b>The Smeds and the Smoos</b> Julia Donaldson (A Green £6.99) A blue alien and a red alien fall in love (4,635)
<b>3</b>	<b>Slime</b> David Walliams (HarperCollins £12.99) A boy takes on an island run by adults intent on making kids miserable (4,530)
<b>4</b>	<b>Coronavirus</b> Elizabeth Jenner, Nia Roberts and Kate Wilson (Nosy Crow £1.99) A book for children on covid-19 (4,155)
<b>5</b>	<b>Look Up!</b> Nathan Bryon (Puffin £6.99) An aspiring astronaut is intent on diverting her brother's attention from his phone (3,345)

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This constant erasure affects careers. It prevents artists from achieving much-needed visibility, making it significantly harder for people who like their work to find the source of it to buy or commission more.

Lack of credit makes it really difficult for businesses to track the success of the artist's work in the industry.

A few years ago, illustrator Sarah McIntyre flagged this point in her ongoing "Pictures Mean Business" campaign which revealed that illustrators are not only being omitted from credits when our work is being shared, but we're also being left off book databases. This puts a major limitation on the ways the success and sales of our books can be tracked.

Another key point is that if illustrators aren't credited then it makes it extremely hard for talented people to consider a career in children's illustration – how will they know one exists, let alone that it's a culturally valued choice?

I'm a self-taught illustrator on account of not being able to afford an education in the arts. It's taken me the best part of a decade to make it to the beginning of a career in an industry where it can take as long as a decade to start earning enough to live comfortably. I'm also a minority in the industry – I'm a Black British illustrator, one of about ten among hundreds of artists. It's rare these days for someone from my background to be successful in this industry and omissions like this present another unnecessary barrier for us to have to overcome just to be able to thrive and benefit from the success of our own work. We talk about the vital importance of diversity in the content we create, particularly for children, but then we leave in place barriers to achieving that diversity . . .

Crediting an illustrator benefits everyone in the long run, but not doing so can be the difference between someone being able to find more work or not. Furthermore this kind of erasure can affect the mental health of beginner and veteran alike. There's a misconception that illustrators and artists do what we do simply for "the love" of it, and while the majority of us love what we do, we also have bills to pay like every other professional... bills that require money. Love isn't legal tender unfortunately.

Children's books are fundamental to our culture. Sadly they don't get nearly enough recognition in the media (that's one for another time!), but when they do – and where an illustrator is involved – it's so important that both the contributors are properly credited.

So we are asking the BBC, and the media more broadly, to ensure that illustrators are given equal acknowledgment wherever illustrated books are being recognised. This really isn't asking much and doesn't cost anything, but the benefits are immeasurable to the artist and go a long way to helping them continue to create the very work that is being celebrated.

Yours sincerely

Illustrators, visual artists and authors everywhere

## **Signatories**

Malorie Blackman  
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Tom Holland  
Chris Mould  
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Onyinye Iwu  
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Helen Poole  
Benji Davies  
Tim Budgen  
Sarah McIntyre  
Candy Gourlay  
Mark Chambers  
Sheena Dempsey  
Luke Newell  
Priscilla Mante  
Philip Reeve  
Catherine Johnson  
Steven Lenton  
Rob Biddulph  
Jenn Ely  
Anne Booth  
Sophie Wills  
Alex Tomlinson  
Paula Bowles  
Fred Blunt  
Margaret Iggulden  
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Michelle Robinson  
Martin Brown  
Michelle Nyarko  
Chris Norris  
Katherine Langrish  
Debi Gliori  
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Bex Glendining  
Gabbie Scanlon  
Francesca Sanna  
Henry White  
Jim Field  
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Selom Sunu  
Zuzanna Turek  
Jenna Cheng  
Stuart Heritage  
Sareeta Domingo  
James Mayhew  
Rachel Middleton  
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Tom Nicoll  
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Lynne Rickards  
Gill Lewis  
Barbara Band  
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Howard Calvert  
Janeen Wilson  
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Joseph Elliott-Coleman  
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Jackie Shepherd  
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Nathan Bryon  
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Tom Hovey  
Darren Simpson  
Colleen Larmour  
Kate Alizadeh  
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Holly Webb  
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Seb Burnett  
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Rosemary Fenton  
Jo McCrum  
Rachel Dorsey  
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Izzy Burton  
Meg McLaren  
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Paddy Donnelly  
Bonnie Helen Hawkins  
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Toni Robinson  
Catherine Cawthorne  
Keezy Young  
Adeyam Tsehay  
Kael Tudor  
Hadley Freeman  
Will Mabbitt  
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Terry Anderson - Cartoonists Rights Network International  
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Jennifer Moore  
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Iain Harvey

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Tom Knight  
Sònia Albert  
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Mark Powers  
Pete Olczyk  
Matt Forsythe  
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